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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIRKUK 000144

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SUBJECT: (C) KRG MINISTER OF EDUCATION ON CHALLENGES, RELATIONS WITH BAGHDAD

REF: KIRKUK 00000143

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jim Bigus, PRT Leader, POL, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: Minister of Education (MOE) for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Dilshad Abdul Rahman Osman Younis, said on August 8 that his ministry had limited relations with the MOE in Baghdad, which was divided into separate Sunni and Shia departments, and that the KRG mostly had relations with the Sunni department when it did have contact. Younis said these poor relations and a limited KRG budget were severely hampering education reforms in the Kurdistan region. Continued reliance on the government in KRG areas for education and employment was not being matched by the current budget, training, or employment opportunities. Schools were separated by gender, which often meant females received no education in rural areas where the budget did not provide for schools. Younis claimed reforms were needed to end continued KDP and PUK influence of the education systems in their respective areas. He claimed a comparative religion program was going to emphasize the non-violent nature of Islam to counter the legacy of Saddam's regime. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

(C) "VERY THIN" RELATIONS WITH BAGHDAD, WITH SUNNIS MOSTLY  
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¶2. (C) KRG Ministry of Education (MOE) head, Dilshad Abdul Rahman Osman Younis, told IPAO on August 8 that the advantages of having one office, with one budget and one governing body, since the merger of the two KRG Education Ministries, was being offset by a "very thin" relationship with the MOE in Baghdad. Younis claimed the KRG recently extended an invitation to the MOE in Baghdad to visit the KRG, but had received no reply. He added there currently was a plan for a KRG MOE delegation to visit Baghdad but that this was delayed "due to the security situation." He said international donors, such as UNESCO, contributed millions of dollars and offered training but dealt directly with Baghdad's MOE, which did not inform the KRG of these programs. He claimed the education system dated back to the 1920s and desperately needed updating and reforms, in particular privatization of education and training staff for this new system.

(C) KRG BUDGET LIMITS; RELIANCE ON KRG FOR EDUCATION, JOBS  
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13. (C) Younis said reliance on the Kurdistan government for education and employment continued, and claimed that recently "the presidents of all the colleges" in the Kurdistan region appealed to the KRG to supply this year's graduates with government jobs. At the same time, he claimed, the KRG devoted budget priorities to more pressing reconstruction issues, such as electricity, water, and fuel. Younis said a 200 million USD construction plan to build urgently needed new school spaces was shelved currently because the KRG had not provided funding. He claimed schools in cities needed funding more than in rural areas, since they had space shortages that forced students to rotate through school in three separate groups of three hour shifts each day, rather than the full six hours.

(C) "NOT EVERYONE CAN WORK IN A HOSPITAL"

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14. (C) Younis said scientific programs were getting the most attention in order to improve employment skills. At the same time, he added, "not everyone can work in a hospital," so this education was not practical for the average secondary level student, since the KRG economy could not absorb enough graduates with these skill levels. He said there was an average of 50 to 60 students in each class, of which about 40 percent were female. He claimed this percentage decreased with advancement from elementary and intermediate levels (which covered grades one through six and were mandatory) to the secondary level, at which point education was no longer mandatory. The schools were separated according to gender, which Younis claimed often meant there were no schools for females, especially in rural areas where there was no budget allowed for these. He added "tons of teachers" from southern areas would prefer to work in KRG areas schools but the education system could not provide employment for them, in many cases because they did not speak Kurdish. He added this was also a problem with the many refugee communities in the KRG areas, who often spoke neither Kurdish nor Arabic, which further complicated the educational goals of his ministry.

(C) REFORMS TO END POLITICAL PARTY INFLUENCE IN EDUCATION

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15. (C) Younis claimed the KRG Education Ministry had clear instruction that neither of the two main Kurdish parties could interfere with or be involved in the education process, but that they were nevertheless. As an example, he claimed 100 percent of the managers in the schools were political appointees and party members. He said there was a study scheduled for the end of the year to check if managers were truly qualified and that they would be fired if they were not, to be replaced with a hiring system based on merit and credentials.

(C) ROLE OF RELIGION IN EDUCATION

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16. (C) The KRG MOE was trying to found a comparative religion program that would teach that Islam was only one of many religions and emphasize its non-violent nature, Younis claimed. This was intended to counter the many years that "the Saddam regime used Islam, Quranic texts, and statements of the Prophet Muhammad to incite violence." Small numbers of people opposed this program, he claimed, "but had no influence."

(C) BIOGRAPHIC NOTES:

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17. (C) Dilshad Abdul Rahman Osman Younis: Appointed as Minister for Education to the unified KRG cabinet on May 7, 2006; born in Sulaymaniyah in 1959; wrote a dissertation in the field of Agriculture and was a university lecturer; former a head of an oil industry project.

(U) COMMENT

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18. (C) The Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Mohammed Shakaly, in a separate meeting claimed that Islamist groups had enough mosques and should concentrate on building schools. (Reftel. Kirkuk 00000143.) This policy, combined with the KRG Education Ministry's limited budget and concentration on privatizing the education sector could be a formula for foreign and local Islamic organizations to exploit.  
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